

Jan Groover

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The Nation's Capital in Photographs, 1976

The exhibition is supported by grants from the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, Washington, D. C.; the Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation, Washington, D. C.; and the National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D. C., a Federal agency.

The Nation's Capital in Photographs, 1976

Jan Groover

The Corcoran Gallery of Art
Washington, D. C.

September 24-November 21, 1976

The Nation's Capital in Photographs, 1976 is an unprecedented Bicentennial project originated by The Corcoran Gallery of Art. Eight eminent American photographers have been invited to spend extended periods—at least a month—in Washington, D. C. during 1975-76 to photograph the city, its environs and people, as each was guided by his own vision. Thus we hoped to achieve a diversified documentation of a place and time. A selection of four prints by each artist is to be earmarked for exhibition at the Corcoran in the Tricentennial year 2076.

The participating artists, each shown separately, two at a time in four stages throughout the year 1976, are LEWIS BALTZ, San Francisco; JOE CAMERON, Washington, D. C.; ROBERT CUMMING, Los Angeles; ROY DECARAVA, New York City; LEE FRIEDLANDER, New York City; JOHN GOSSAGE, Washington, D. C.; JAN GROOVER, New York City; and ANTHONY HERNANDEZ, Los Angeles.

The artists were selected by Chief Curator Jane Livingston and Assistant Curator Frances Fralin. As organizers of this series of exhibitions they have been responsible for the complete task of scheduling and working with the artists at every stage of the project's long development, and for producing the eight catalogues. I wish to express my special appreciation to them and to each of the eight artists for their unstinting cooperation.

The exhibition is supported by grants from the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, Washington, D. C.; the Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation, Washington, D. C.; and the National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D. C., a Federal agency.

Roy Slade, *Director*

Jan Groover works in an esthetic area which cannot be viewed—or at least judged—strictly from a straight photographic point of view. The immediately striking attributes singling her out from the other photographers in this project are her use of color rather than black and white imagery, the large size of the images, and their presentations in three- or, less often, two- or four-part formats. Groover combines the ability of photography to record a slice of reality, with the sculptor or painter's compositional and juxtapositional instincts. She seems poised between a highly schematic esthetic, conditioned by her New York intellectual milieu, and an extremely seductive, elegant and imaginatively satisfying one.

Her color-photograph works preceding this body of photographs tended extremely in the direction of methodical arrangement: what one first wanted to decipher, seeing these, was the *system* behind the serially presented images. The sensuous esthetic response was less immediate than the mentally curious one. She would typically present photographs of a single site (usually in lower Manhattan or on outlying freeways) taken at two or three different times, with two or three different moving vehicles passing by. Simple as this idea is, when coming upon the works it takes a certain consciously cerebral act to ascertain the system. Groover says she was primarily interested, using this particular device, in exploring *spatial* effects—apparent shifts in perspective and scale—rather than being concerned with making variations for the usual sake of working serially, either in an investigation of “theme” or of *time*. An example of how this actually works—how scale and perspective and our perception of things in general are investigated with Groover's “moving objects” device—is evident

here in cat. no. 16. The writer Phil Patton, reviewing a recent exhibition of Groover's work in New York, quite neatly states her intention this way: “Groover's central premise is that change across time is a close relative to change across space. It lets her make a wonderfully sly and shifty art, where no factor is held constant and yet none seems undetermined.”

In the Washington photographs Groover has worked much less rigidly and schematically than before. This is true in two ways: first, she actually used more diverse and complex “premises” to unite each series of images; and second, the look of the photographs is much more lush, somehow more alluring and opulent, than was previously apparent. This is largely due to the environment being scrutinized—Georgetown and the Washington, D. C. Mall are not downtown Manhattan or the highways of New Jersey.

The organizing systems in the present photographs become more literary and whimsical than we might have thought possible in light of the past work. Groover's own quite formidable wit, rather than a calculated plan of attack based on a strictly minimal-intellectual approach, suddenly comes into play. She seems to be getting away from an attachment she perhaps obligatorily expressed but didn't feel deeply, to the post-minimalist types in her New York milieu. The reductive and openly calculated systems behind the work of Sol LeWitt, Robert Mangold, Jennifer Bartlett, Jackie Ferrara, which one cannot help but feel have to some extent informed Groover's work, become much less apparent in the present work. It is as though Groover needed the geographic distance she found in the present assignment in order to clear her head for a move into an underivative expression.

Most of the groups of photographs taken in Georgetown have as their underlying schematic principle something as simple as tree trunks, of relatively similar size and placed identically in the picture format (cat. no. 21), or a uniformly positioned base-line (cat. no. 7). What begins to matter much more than the system, however, are the sophisticated visual juxtapositions which Groover finds and which occur in our perception not intellectually, but in the realms of emotion and delectation. More and more the quality itself of color asserts itself: in cat. no. 22, among others, color, luminosity and textural nuance come so complexly and successfully into play that whatever schematic proposition guided its formulation could hardly matter less.

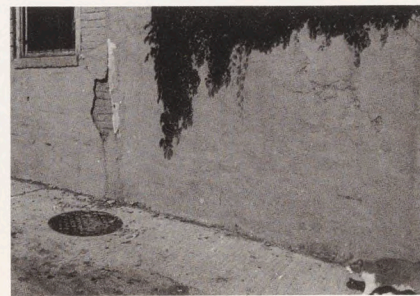
It is interesting to compare Groover's habit of placing in the center foregrounds of her pictures a conspicuous foreground object—usually, in her case, a pole or tree trunk—to this same contrivance as it is handled by John Gossage. For Groover, the intention is expedient: the intruding area in the picture is perceived as a means to a calculated apperceptive end. Because it is repeated twice or three times, we don't assess its meaning for the pictorial composition in terms of either abstract esthetic success/failure, or as an evocative *psychological* trigger (as barrier to "meaning," or emotionally confusing apparition). Gossage, on the other hand, engages us precisely on both these levels. His intrusive, centered, close-up objects operate *esthetically*: they become meaningful in the process of delectation or taste, as well as for our emotional reaction to the subjects of the pictures.

Groover's work in general, however, shares with Gossage's the intimation that it is closer now than ever before to eliciting a complete esthetic response. She

is even commanding a repertory of several "esthetics." The special literary feel, the emphases on wit and thought which characterize some of the works in this cycle, inhere less in the Georgetown or moving-vehicle works than in the ones treating Washington's more official side—the monuments and architecture of the Capital. Cat. nos. 24 and 17 combine cleverly arranged subject matter giving a great deal of information about place; with wittily cerebral elements; with, finally, great chromatic and compositional elegance. So we see essentially three types of work in this exhibition: the ones extending her familiar moving-object idea; the more diversified, delectable and fluent Georgetown photographs; and the extremely witty and elegant works centering on the clean, stately edifices and monuments which are at the heart of the Washington, D. C. ethos.

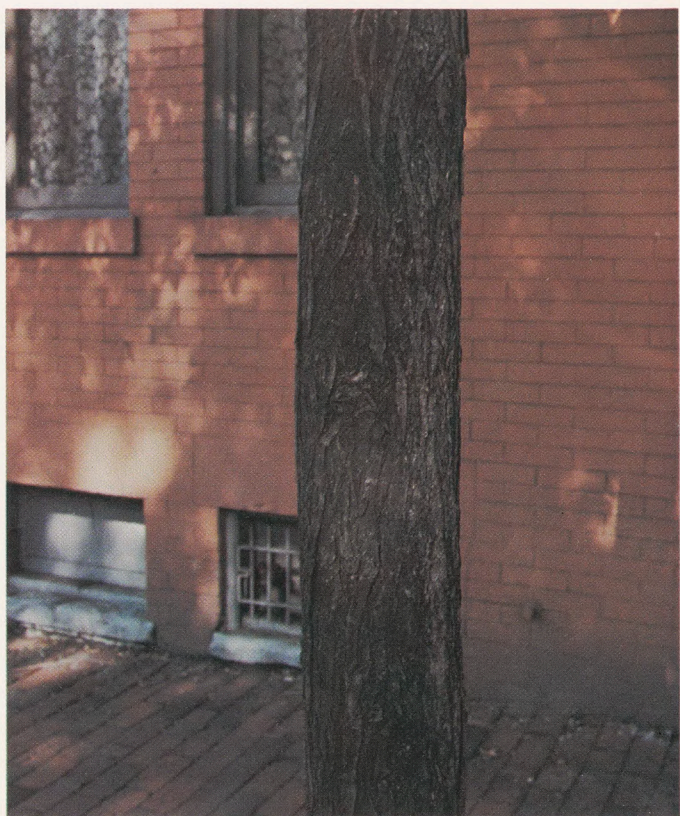
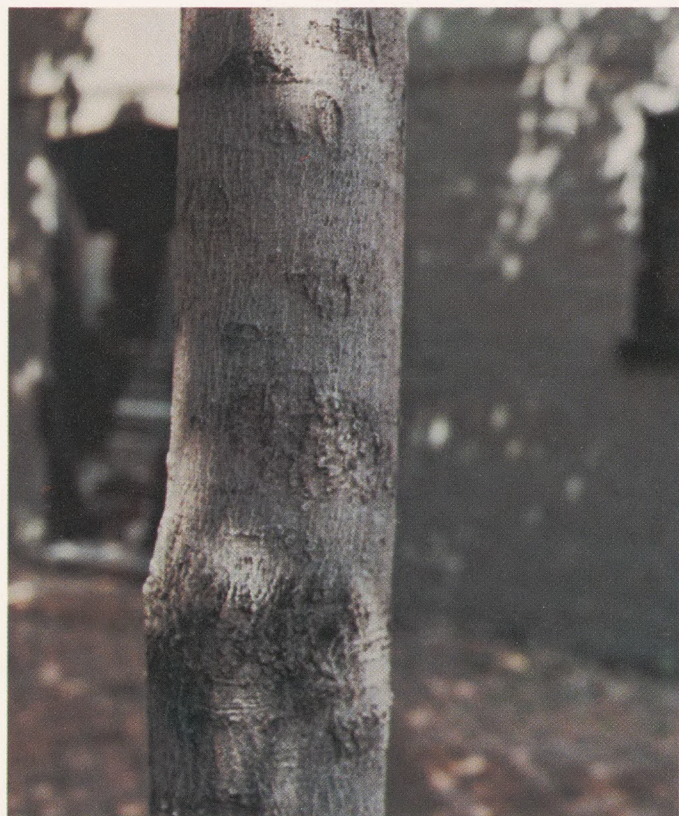
One of the qualities one may fairly require from serious photographs is an old and simple one: merely that they show you "reality," or "the existing world," in ways that alter or refresh your own perception of that world. If we are led through seeing a photograph to an expanded awareness of our environment, something important has happened. Groover's work accomplishes this basic task, at least for me: it is perhaps an ulterior event, not central to the artist's intention—but it is something for which we are grateful.

Jane Livingston



No. 6
No. 7







No. 13



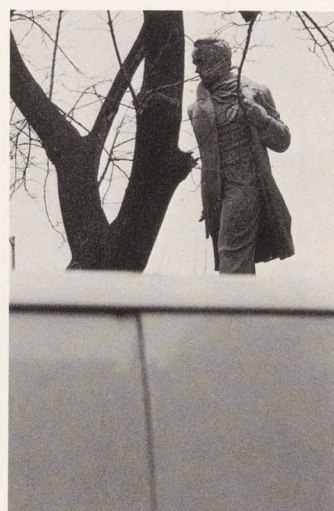
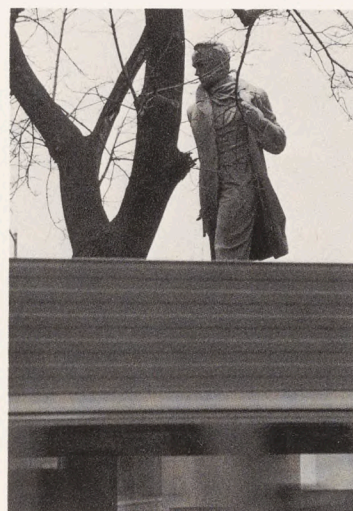


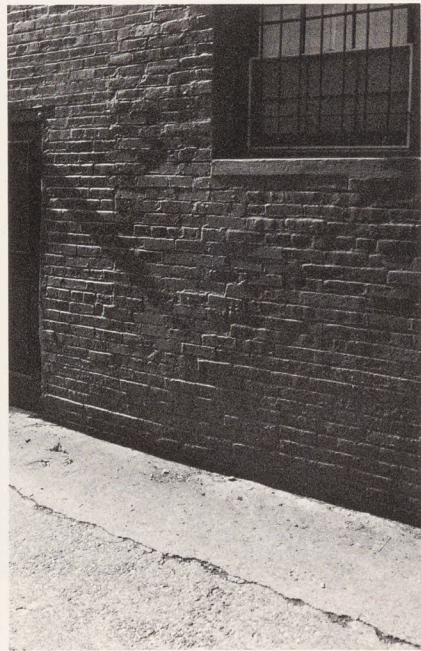
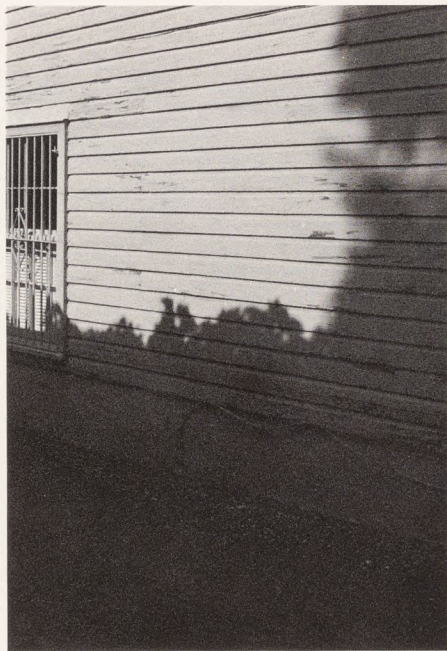
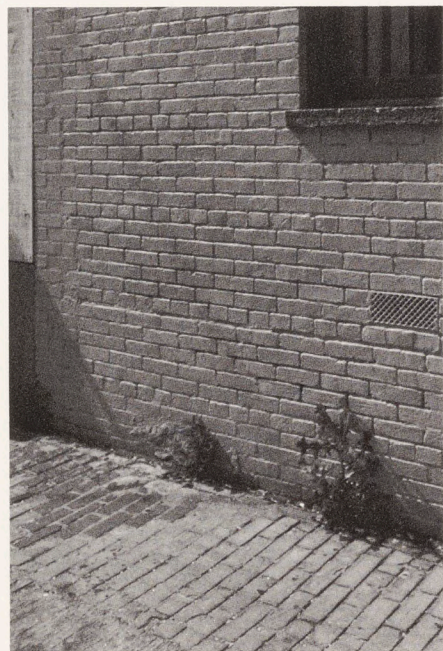
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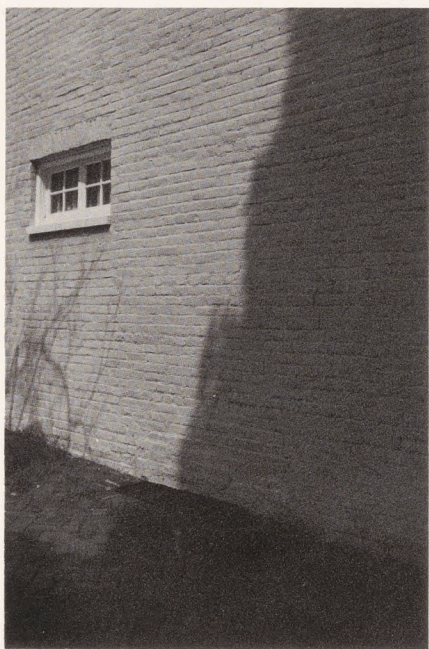


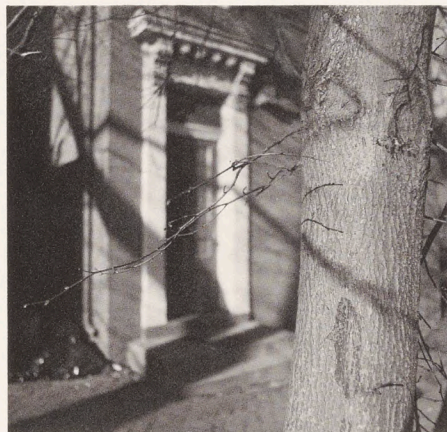
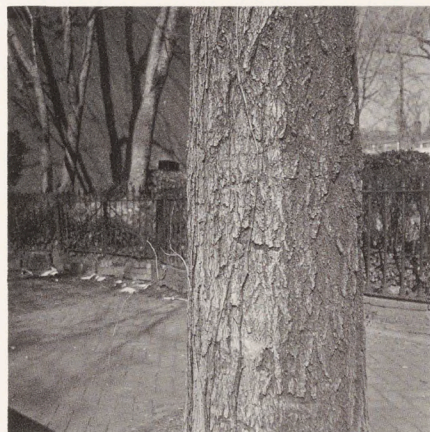


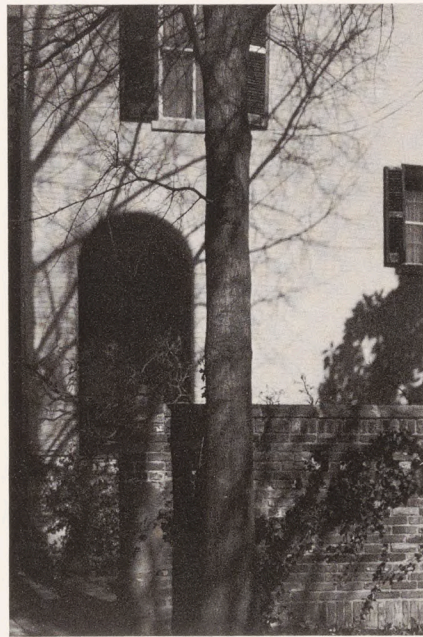












Catalogue of the Exhibition

Dimensions are in inches; height precedes width.

1. 305.7.10
2 images 6 x 9 each, mounted on 16 x 30 mat
2. 304.3.15
2 images 6 x 9 each, mounted on 16 x 30 mat
3. 309.32, 305.36, 308.34
3 images 6 x 9 each, mounted on 16 x 40 mat
4. 305.15, 306.16a, 305.12
3 images 6 x 9 each, mounted on 16 x 40 mat
5. 364.24, 370.19, 364.35
3 images 6 x 9 each, mounted on 16 x 40 mat
6. 366.28, 364.29, 366.18
3 images 6 x 9 each, mounted on 16 x 40 mat
7. 369.10, 375.25, 369.8
3 images 6 x 9 each, mounted on 16 x 40 mat
8. 369.23, 269.24, 367.19
3 images 6 x 9 each, mounted on 16 x 40 mat
9. 315.7.11
2 images 9 x 6 each, mounted on 20 x 24 mat
10. 316.14, 316.33, 315.34
3 images 9 x 6 each, mounted on 20 x 30 mat
11. 316.15, 317.5, 316.4
3 images 9 x 6 each, mounted on 20 x 30 mat
12. 316.24, 315.35, 316.36
3 images 9 x 6 each, mounted on 20 x 30 mat
13. 366.32, 364.17, 366.20
3 images 9 x 6 each, mounted on 20 x 30 mat
14. 366.3, 365.3, 366.16
3 images 9 x 6 each, mounted on 20 x 30 mat
15. 369.5, 369.32, 364.6
3 images 9 x 6 each, mounted on 20 x 30 mat
16. 308.0.1.5.6
4 images 9 x 6 each, mounted on 20 x 32 mat
17. 312.15.11.6.4
4 images 9 x 6 each, mounted on 20 x 32 mat
18. 372.12, 367.18, 372.15.8
4 images 9 x 6 each, mounted on 20 x 32 mat
19. 335.11, 333.7, 335.7
3 images 10 x 10 each, mounted on 20 x 40 mat
20. 333.4, 335.2, 334.12
3 images 10 x 10 each, mounted on 20 x 40 mat
21. 336.2, 334.6, 336.12
3 images 10 x 10 each, mounted on 20 x 40 mat
22. 334.1, 333.2, 333.5
3 images 10 x 10 each, mounted on 20 x 40 mat
23. 326.11.12
2 images 15 x 15 each, mounted on 25 x 40 mat
24. 339.5, 320.2, 323.6
3 images 15 x 15 each, mounted on 27 x 58 mat
25. 323.1, 324.4, 324.5
3 images 15 x 15 each, mounted on 27 x 58 mat
26. 310.21a.24a.22a
3 images 13 x 19 each, mounted on 30 x 50 mat

Jan Groover

Born Plainfield, New Jersey, 1943.
B.F.A. Pratt Institute, New York City, 1965.
M.F.A. Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, 1970.
Taught University of Hartford, Connecticut, 1970-73.
Lives New York City.

Individual Exhibitions

1974 Light Gallery, New York City.
1976 Max Protetch Gallery, New York City.
International Museum of Photography,
George Eastman House, Rochester, New York.

Group Exhibitions

1975 "Time and Transformation," Lowe Art Gallery,
University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida.
"(photo) (photo)² . . . (photo)", University of
Maryland, College Park, Maryland; San Francisco
Museum of Art, San Francisco, California.
1976 "Photographer's Choice," Witkin Gallery,
New York City.
"Sequences," Broxton Gallery, Los Angeles, California.
Max Protetch Gallery, New York City.

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Groover, Jan. "The Medium is the Use," *Artforum*, vol. XII, no. 3, November 1973, pp. 79-80.
Kozloff, Max. "Photos Within Photographs," *The Photographers' Choice*, ed. by Kelly Wise, Addison House, Danbury, New Hampshire, 1975, pp. 26-31, 210; ill. p. 30.
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Woolard, Robert W. "Uses and Misuses of Sequential Images," *Artweek*, vol. 21, May 22, 1976, p. 11.

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